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UM mobile lab takes job training facilities to small high schools

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IMMEDIATELY

UM MOBILE LAB TAKES JOB TRAINING FACILITIES TO SMALL HIGH SCHOOLS

By Maribeth Dwyer
UM Information Services

MISSOULA--

Thanks to the University of Montana mobile reprographics laboratory, students in 11 small high schools are learning marketable skills in graphic communications that until this year have been taught only in large, urban schools.

The mobile unit, which spends two weeks at each school on its itinerary, started touring Sept. 7. It will return to the campus Dec. 7, be used in the UM's instructional program for business education majors winter quarter, and hit the road again in the spring.

The traveling lab will cover about 6,000 miles fall quarter, visiting high schools in Hardin, Sept. 4-17; Colstrip, Sept. 17-28; Roundup, Oct. 1-16; Miles City, Oct. 22-Nov. 2; Forsyth, Nov. 5-20; Custer, Nov. 26-Dec. 7.

The unit will log another 1,000 miles spring quarter when it travels to Drummond, Hot Springs, Charlo, Ronan, and St. Ignatius.

Dr. Bill Patton of the UM School of Education takes the lab to each town and sets it up. In about two weeks, he returns to drive the unit to the next stop.

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Patton is an associate professor of business education and office administration at the University. He is a past president of the Montana Business Education Association and, in July, will become secretary of the Montana Vocational Association.

Recognizing the vocational value of training in graphic communications, Patton conceived the idea of a traveling lab as a way to reach students with the most need for job skills and the least opportunity of acquiring them.

He talked over his idea with colleagues concerned with vocational education, including Jim Golden, special needs consultant in the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. As a result of his collaboration with Golden, grants totaling about $37,000 were awarded to the University by the Office of Public Instruction for planning and launching the UM project.

Part of the grant money paid for a 17-foot, twin axle camper-trailer, and the equipment which converted it into a reprographics laboratory.

The schools served by the unit were selected because they had high numbers of dropouts and of students who were unable to find jobs after leaving school.

The business-education teachers from these schools came to the UM campus for a two-week workshop during the summer of 1979 to prepare for introducing instruction in graphics communication in their classrooms.

Patton conducted the workshop, which was planned with the aid of Dr. Donald Koeppen of the UM Division of Business Education and Jim Bunch, Chairman of the Graphics Arts Department at the Billings Career Center, part of the Billings public school system.

"A workshop feature of tremendous value to the teachers," Patton said, "was a tour of the Missoulian, which gave them a comprehensive view of the workings of a newspaper's editorial side and physical plant."

The teachers returned to their schools primed to prepare their students for the visits of the UM mobile reprographics lab.

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For about a week and a half before the lab arrives at a school, the teacher presents slide shows on careers in reprographics and gives instruction in layout and design of brochures, letterheads, notepads, posters, resumes for job applications, etc. By the time the lab rolls into town, the students are ready to learn to use the lab equipment to carry out projects of their own conception and design.

The lab equipment includes a computerized typewriter, which has a keyboard much like a conventional typewriter's. Information typed on the keyboard appears on a full-page screen above the keyboard, so errors can be easily spotted and then corrected electronically. A push of a button transfers the copy from the screen to one of two discs that store the typed material. At any time after this point, the operator can tell the machine to print the material, which it does at a speed of 540 words per minute.

The lab also contains a memory typewriter which, like the computerized typewriter, permits the typist to store material and call it forth on demand. This machine can store and recall up to 100 pages of material while the computerized typewriter accommodates 77 pages.

With these two word processors and the lab's offset press, platemaker, and instant camera, a student can turn out a variety of eye-catching pieces inexpensively. For example, the offset duplicator can handle four colors of ink and black ink.

The student derives great satisfaction from carrying projects through from idea to finished product--and in the process acquires highly marketable skills. Patton points out that this training in graphic communications is useful to students who plan to become secretaries, business-education teachers, or graphics designers.

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If this training is so valuable, why doesn't every Montana high school offer it? The biggest obstacle is the expense, Patton says. The computerized typewriter carries a price tag of $14,000; and to teach just the basics, a school would have to have at least an offset press--which costs $3,300, and a platemaker, which sells for $3,000.

The cost of even the two indispensable items is prohibitive for many schools. Patton notes that some small schools are solving the problem by pooling their resources. For example, the high schools in Opheim, Nashua, and Peerless shared the cost of reprographics equipment that each school uses for a third of the year.

Another example of cost reduction is the project undertaken at Rudyard, Hingham and Kremlin-Gilford. Under the direction of Mrs. Barb Krause from Rudyard, these schools purchased a $20,000 IBM System 6 word-processing unit and are using it for teaching on a shared-time basis.

Maybe some day all Montana high schools will have the resources to offer training in graphic communications. In the meantime, the UM mobile reprographics lab is giving many students in small schools a competitive edge in the job market.

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